



Jackson Purchase Historical
Society

Volume 29 | Number 1

Article 2

7-2002

Monumental Procession

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/jphs>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2002) "Monumental Procession," *Jackson Purchase Historical Society*. Vol. 29 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/jphs/vol29/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Murray State's Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jackson Purchase Historical Society by an authorized editor of Murray State's Digital Commons. For more information, please contact msu.digitalcommons@murraystate.edu.

Monumental Procession

by
Julia Wooldridge

Also known as "The Strange Procession Which Never Moves," the Wooldridge Monuments have baffled people since the late 1890s. A cryptic sight greets those who visit Maplewood Cemetery in Mayfield, Kentucky.

Surrounding the grave of one Col. Henry G. Wooldridge stand eighteen figures carved of sandstone and marble. Yet only Henry is interred here.

Why did Henry decide to have this statuary erected in Mayfield instead of in his home state of Tennessee?

As far as we know, the first Wooldridge in America was John Wooldridge (*ca.* 1678-1757), who was first in Henrico County, Virginia. He was a blacksmith, farmer and founder of a long-lived and far-spread family. Coal in the region preserved its early reputation for smithing, and perhaps a strategic location near good coal fostered Wooldridge's success.

John Wooldridge probably came to Virginia as a young man. He was part of, or at most a generation removed from, the high tide of immigration to the colony after 1650, as a result of which by the turn of the century thousands of former servants, their terms completed, faced life on their own in Virginia. In Virginia it meant starting from the bottom. But indentured service or apprenticeship could have furnished an opportunity. It gave John a trade and a degree of literacy, but apparently did not make him meek. He comes into the records demanding his due.

In his will, John listed his wife Martha (*ca.* 1688-1757) with no mention of her maiden name. The six children were listed in apparently chronological order. The writer is descended from the third son William. Henry G. Wooldridge was descended from the fourth son Edward.

Edward Wooldridge (*ca.* 1711-1808) was probably born in what is now Chesterfield County, Virginia, then the south side of Henrico County. He was a prosperous planter of his day, owning 1600 acres in Virginia and 2000 acres in Kentucky, though he never moved to this state. Edward married Mary Flournoy, sister of Sarah Flournoy, who married Edward's brother William. The Flournoys were among the French Huguenots who came to Manakin, Virginia. Edward and Mary Flournoy Wooldridge had six children. One son, Simon Wooldridge (*ca.* 1750-1830) had a son Josiah, who was the father of Henry G. Wooldridge. Josiah Wooldridge migrated to Tennessee and married Keziah Nichols, daughter of John and Sarah Stout Nichols, in Davidson County, Tennessee, where all eight of their children were born and where he died in 1825.

Henry G. Wooldridge migrated with his mother Keziah, two brothers, two sisters and other relatives to Graves County, Kentucky, around 1843. They settled in its southwest corner within the vicinity of the town of Feliciana, which is generally regarded as one of the earliest settlements, if not the earliest in Graves County. In all accounts, in 1842 Feliciana was a thriving town and continued to be for a number of years. Its decline began shortly before the Civil War. Landowners in the area refused to sell rights of way for the tracks of the New Orleans and Ohio Railroad, then building a line from Obion Junction in Tennessee to Paducah, Kentucky, on the Ohio River. One reason for the refusal was fear that their livestock would be killed by a train. The rail station of Water Valley gradually took over Feliciana's business and eventually its post office.

Keziah Nichols Wooldridge, mother of Henry G. Wooldridge, died January 11, 1846. She is buried in Old Bethlehem Cemetery, located about 150 yards north of Kentucky State Highway 94, between Water Valley and Pilot Oak in Graves County. Also buried there are her son Josiah, who died in 1852, her daughter Narcissa, two of Narcissa Wooldridge Berryman's children and other family members. The cemetery is near the farm owned by Henry G. Wooldridge, a part of which is still in the family.

In 1881 Henry moved to Mayfield from Water Valley. His home is shown near Water Valley in the *1880 Atlas of Graves County*. Mayfield, Graves County seat, was founded in 1823. For over a century people have come here to Mayfield to gaze with a mixture of reverence and puzzlement at one of the world's strangest groups of memorials to the dead. The man responsible for the monuments was Henry G. Wooldridge, who was born in 1822 and died in 1899, six years after his statue was sculpted. He was interred in a vault in the midst of this strange group of statues, the only person buried there.

The whimsical Mr. Wooldridge was very proud of his blue-blooded lineage. He believed that an enduring memorial should be installed that would be different from prosaic stones appearing in most cemeteries. He decided upon an open air "Hall of Fame," where for all time the figures of himself, members of his family and the animals he loved would be preserved in enduring stone. While most of his relatives were born natives of nearby Tennessee, that fact did not interfere with Mr. Wooldridge's plans to memorialize them in Kentucky. It has been said that the monuments cost approximately \$6000. The tall monument in the center is that of Henry G. Wooldridge. It is carved from Italian marble and was brought to the United States from Italy, costing the old gentleman \$1000. The three statues in the back of the Wooldridge lot were carved in Mayfield by a local tombstone maker, costing a total of \$500. All the rest of the statues, made of sandstone, were carved in Paducah, Kentucky, and

brought to Mayfield by freight train. William Lydon, who lived in Paducah, sculpted the statues from stone mined in southern Indiana. These statues were erected to the memory of his mother, Keziah Wooldridge; to his four brothers--John H., W.F., Alfred N., and Josiah Wooldridge; to his three sisters--Narcissa Berryman, Susan Neely, and Minerva Nichols; and to two other relatives: his favorite great-nieces, Minnie Neely and Maud Reeds. To these were added statues of two of his favorite hounds, a fox, and a deer, and of his favorite horse, "Fop," with himself astride.

A nephew, William J. Neely, was named in the will of Henry G. Wooldridge when he was bequeathed the value of two notes held against him. This indebtedness was for his purchase from Uncle Henry of land on February 9, 1888. His son Jake Neely became joint owner of this land, some of which still remains in the family. On May 5, 1894, William J. and wife Mary Tom, J.T., Ida Neely, and Henry G. Wooldridge transferred land for a schoolhouse to the school commissioners. This was Ceder Hill School.

Henry G. Wooldridge spent his last days in a home in Mayfield, on the corner of Ninth Street and Broadway, across from the Presbyterian Church. This home he obtained on December 31, 1894, from his nephew William Henry Wooldridge and wife, Pearl Elmore Wooldridge, trading it for nineteen acres west of Mayfield. In his will (Henry G. Wooldridge Will Book A, page 299) dated October 21, 1898, only a little more than six months before his death, he bequeathed this property to Thomas J. Nash and wife Mary Alice Nash, for taking care of him during his last days. On May 30, 1899, Henry G. Wooldridge died.

In spite of reality and rumor, the Wooldridge family appears to "rest-in-peace," preserved forever in marble and sandstone in Maplewood Cemetery in Mayfield, Kentucky.

